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CIRCULAR LETTER,

FROM THE

ASSOCIATED

Protestant Dissenting Ministers,

CONVENED AT PORTSEA, HANTS,

MAY 4, 1796;

ADDRESSED

To the CHURCHES and CONGREGATIONS

AT

ALTON, ANDOVER, BASINGSTOKE, CHRISTCHURCH,
FAREHAM, FORDINGBRIDGE, GOSPORT, HAVANT,
LYMINGTON, NEWPORT—(ISLE OF WIGHT),
PORTSEA, POOLE—(DORSET), ROMSEY,
RINGWOOD, SOUTHAMPTON, SALIS-
BURY—(WILTS), TADLEY, WIN-
CHESTER, & WHITCHURCH.

WITH MINUTES OF THEIR PROCEEDINGS.

SOUTHAMPTON:

PRINTED BY T. BAKER.

MDCCXCVI.

Advertisement.

AS there was found room in the paper, the writer of the Circular Letter presumes it will not be disagreeable to his brethren and friends in the different societies addressed in it, if he prefixes a short account of this Association.

The ancient meeting of ministers being discontinued, this Association was instituted by some of the elder ministers in the year 1781. After it had met twenty-five times, at different places, it was resolved in 1787, that the subject for the morning sermon for the future, should be chosen by a majority of the ministers present. Accordingly, the following subjects have been considered.

The insufficiency of reason and the necessity of a divine revelation, by Mr. Ashburner, from 1. Cor. i. 21.

The external and internal evidences and excellencies of the holy scripture, by Mr. Kingsbury, from II. Tim. iii. 16.

The importance of holding right sentiments in religion, by Mr. Bogue, from II. Tim. i. 13.

The character of God as the moral governor of the world, by Mr. Adams, from Deut. xxxii. 4.

Man's fallen state, by Mr. Wise, from Rom. v. 12.

The depravity and misery of man as fallen, by Mr. Berry, from Rom. iii. 9.

The inability of man to restore himself to the favour and image of God, by Mr. Dunn, from Jer. xiii. 23.

The plan formed for the recovery of fallen man, by Mr. Mercer, on Zech. vi. 13.

The proper Godhead of Christ, by Mr. Lewis, from Rom. ix. 5.

On the person of Christ, as God-man, by Mr. Kingsbury, from John i. 14.

The prophetic office of Christ, by Mr. Ashburner, from Acts iii. 22.

The atonement of Christ, by Mr. Bogue, from I. John ii. 2.

The intercession of Christ, by Mr. Adams, from Heb. vii. 25.

The nature and extent of the kingly office of Christ, by Mr. Wise, from John xviii. 36.

The divinity of the Holy Ghost, by Mr. Berry, from Acts v. 4.

Regeneration, by Mr. Eisdell, from Eph. ii. 10.

Faith in Christ, by Mr. Lewis, from Acts xvi. 31.

Justification, by Mr. Jefferson, from

Adoption, by Mr. Griffin, from

Sanctification, by Mr. Steill, from I. Theff. iv. 3.

It is usual to have a particular subject proposed at a previous meeting to employ our conversation, on which every minister gives his opinion.

I have taken the liberty to add two hymns, one composed some years ago for a meeting of ministers—the other, an encouragement to missionaries, whether at home or abroad.



Minutes of the Proceedings.

MET at seven o'clock on Tuesday evening; Mr. Eisdell of Andover preached from Isaiah xli. 17, 18.

Met again on Wednesday morning at a quarter before seven o'clock; Mr. Bingham of Whitchurch preached from II. Tim. iii. 5.

Assembled again at half past ten; Mr. Cox of Fareham began with prayer, and reading the scriptures, Isaiah lx. Mr. Kingsbury of Southampton engaged in the general prayer, and Mr. Bogue of Gosport in the intercessory prayer. Mr. Steill of Winchester preached on the subject of sanctification, from I. Thess. iv. 3. Mr. Loader of Ford- ingbridge concluded in prayer.

In the afternoon, the subject discussed in conversation was "Whether Divine Grace operates first on the understanding, or on the will of man?"

It having been resolved at the last meeting that Mr. Kingsbury should draw up a Letter of Address to the several congregations in our connection, the same was presented and approved, and Mr. K. was requested to print and circulate it.

Met at half an hour after six in the evening; Mr. Jefferson of Basingstoke opened the service with prayer; Mr. Adams of Salisbury preached from Hosea, xi. 4.; and Mr. Eisdell of Andover concluded with prayer. The place of next meeting was fixed to be at Ringwood, on September 14, 1796; the preacher Mr. Cox of Fareham; the subject, "growth in grace;" the question to be considered in conversation, "What are the best means to be used, as to matter, method, and manner, for conveying the knowledge of the Gospel to the ignorant people in country villages?"

A CIRCULAR LETTER, &c.

MEN AND BRETHREN,

IT having been judged expedient, for the further extension of Christian edification, by our associations, to present you with a *brief account of our proceedings*, and of the *general state of religion among us*, as well as the *result of our remarks*, in a way of seasonable warning, exhortation, or comfort—we greet you in the name of the Lord.

With no small satisfaction we announce to you the general peace and prosperity of the Churches under our charge. Amidst these shaking times, they continue steady in the profession of the great *Doctrines of God our Saviour*, and are not removed away from the hope of the Gospel. We trust we can say with truth, our Master grants out worshipping assemblies gracious tokens of his presence, and gives testimony to the word of his grace. Some people, Oh that we had reason to say *very many*, are added unto the Lord, and to us, according to the will of God. And though we are not without causes of grief and lamentation, on account of the *lukewarmness*, *worldliness*, and *declensions* we see in some professors; yet we are comforted in the progress of others in a holy walk, in the perseverance of many to the end, and in their peaceful departure from the body, and joyful triumph over the last enemy.

With additional pleasure we state, that some *old congregations*, which had dwindled almost to nothing, and were ready to be entirely dissolved, have been revived, by the Lord's making manifest the favour of his knowledge among them. They have been supplied with pastors, who have encouraging prospects of comfort and success.

The seed of gospel truth has also been sown in *uncultivated ground*. Attentive congregations are forming where there were none before; and there is encouraging scriptural reason to believe that great, real, and substantial good is done by the excursive labours of us and our brethren. We, who are the servants of souls for Christ's sake, cannot but with grief and sorrow see thousands perishing for lack of knowledge; we wish to be roused from slothful indulgence, elder as well as younger, to go forth from our resting places, to make excursions, as we have opportunity, to surrounding towns and villages; to be instant in season and out of season; to carry the light of life into dark places; and knowing the terrors of the Lord, to rouse poor sinners to a sense of their awful state, and to persuade them to flee from the wrath to come. But this cannot be well done without the encouragement of our people. We earnestly call upon you, therefore, to countenance and support us in these efforts. If any of you have habitations or connections in country places, we recommend it to you, that you would *open your houses*, or *exhort your friends so to do*, to receive a preached Gospel. The present awful state of things, in a religious view, calls loudly on us

to make some exertions ;—Behold the prevailing and increasing ignorance, stupidity, and profligacy of the *poor*—the rejection of all fear of God—the sabbath breaking—the fashionable infidelity and scepticism amongst those in *higher condition*—the negligence of *many pastors*, who are not only totally unconcerned about the salvation of their flocks, but by their example encourage rather than reprove the wicked. And, say, is it not time for us, not only to cry “Help Lord,” but to contrive what may be done, under a divine blessing, to encourage proper persons to go forth, and to call upon men, every where, to repent, and believe the Gospel? ’Tis true you may thereby expose yourselves to shame, opposition, reproach, and persecution, from an ungodly world, envious or lukewarm professors. But, consider *the Cause*—the glory of Christ our Master, and the salvation of perishing souls. Let us not shrink from the cross. Remember *who* bare a *much heavier one* before us, and for our sakes, despising all its shame. Remember who has promised that his yoke shall be easy, and his burden light; and that the Word is never preached and heard with a purer joy in the Holy Ghost, than when delivered and received in much affliction.—I. Theff. i. 6. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory, and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.—I. Pet. iv. 14. And oh, above all, think of the unspeakable pleasure of meeting Christ with acceptance, and souls saved by your instrumentality, at the great day.

Amidst the dark and gloomy aspect of things around us, what an encouraging sign would this missionary spirit for spreading the Gospel at home be, especially when viewed in connection with that which has been of late stirred up to send the Gospel abroad. At least we shall prove the *sincerity* of our desire to do good, when we ourselves *put our own shoulders* to the missionary yoke, and are willing to suffer a small measure of those *labours*, and *hardships*, and *persecutions*, which they, whom we send to foreign parts, must undergo.

We rejoice with you, brethren, that the Lord has enkindled, and spread such a glowing zeal in the breasts of multitudes for sending the knowledge of salvation, and spreading the Redeemer’s kingdom among the poor Heathen, in the uttermost parts of the earth. Surely such a noble, benevolent, enlarged spirit, stimulating so many of God’s people to such disinterested efforts—accompanied with the fervent prayers of so many thousands—cannot be the phrenzy of a moment, or the mere work of man! We rejoice that *so many of you*, according to your ability, have liberally come forward in the support of that great and good design. “May he that ministereth seed to the sower, both “minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness!”—II. Cor. ix. 10. And to those of you who have not yet sent in your benefactions, we would say, “as ye abound in every thing, in faith, in utterance, and in knowledge, “and in all diligence, and in your love to us; see that ye *abound in this grace also*.” Would ye enjoy the noblest consolation—What will more expand the heart, than the *generous* sentiments of benevolence to poor sinners, who know neither the value nor the danger of their
own

own souls? God honours nothing with a *sweeter* or more *immediate* reward in the conscience, than a *self-denying* zeal for the good of men, and the glory of Christ. And, oh consider what a blessed recollection it will afford you hereafter, when you shall hear that many Pagans are brought to the knowledge of salvation, that *you* were instrumental in the glorious work. But on the other hand, would it not be a *mortifying* reflection, that *you had not*, nor *would have* any concern, or share in it? And, even though the people should not be gathered, so soon as our wishes may suggest, yet those who encourage it will at least have the approbation of God, and the pleasing consciousness, that it was in their hearts.

Brethren, pray without ceasing. Rest not contented without *maintaining* and *enjoying* the life and power of Godliness in *secret prayer*. It is easy to sink into declensions. All the deceitfulness of sin, and all the wiles of the Devil, will be employed to draw away your attention from a calm, conscientious, close, and comfortable walk with God—Let *family religion* be *constant, solemn, lively, and spiritual*—Dare to be accounted fools for Christ's, and his truth's sake—*Glorrying* in his cross, and *despising* its shame—*Shame* the pretenders to superior *reason*, and more exalted *virtue*, by the manly *dignity*, the *consistency*, the *meekness*, and the *purity* of your conversation—Let them see that *your faith*, however ridiculed, enables you to overcome the world; and that the Grace of God which they despise, teaches you to deny ungodliness and worldly follies and lusts—Prove to all that the love and the kindness of God our Saviour to man, has been manifested to you, and shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost; by its lustre shining forth in your temper and actions, to silence and confound the ignorance of foolish men. We beseech you to be steady, regular, and early in your *attendance in the House of God*. Grieve not the hearts of your ministers, by your absence through worldliness, sloth, and negligence; or by giving way to a vain curiosity, in going after every new thing—Imitate the children of this world by your spiritual diligence in seeking after the meat and riches which endure for ever.

We ask your *assistance* and *concurrence* in the management of our ministerial visits. Our lips should feed many, and spread the favour of the knowledge of Christ in *every place*. We entreat you then not only to *bear* with us, but *encourage* us, when we would teach from house to house—Do not expect us to be the mere retailers of news, and always to amuse you by pleasantries; but permit us to introduce something grave, and useful; something of the scriptures, and of sin's evil; something of Christ, holiness, and heaven, *at all times*. It has sometimes grieved the hearts of pious ministers to observe, that when a serious remark has been introduced, though not unseasonably, or by force, it has checked the flow of the conversation, struck the company dumb, and made them look about as if a foreigner had spoken an unintelligible language. Allow us to be free with you, and impart to you the result of our inquiries, observations, and experience. Many things highly proper for the private ear, cannot well be introduced into public discourses. And we beseech you brethren to know them which labour among you,
and

and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you. Be free in opening your spiritual cases to us, your perplexities, doubts, &c. that we may know how to pray for you, and how to speak to you,—that we may warn every man, and teach every man,—that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brethren, we recommend frequent meetings for prayer, among yourselves, to implore the blessing of God on the Missionary Societies, for more of a missionary spirit at home, for the dew of his Spirit on our own churches, and on all our souls—Pray for *us*.—We trust we can say, without ceasing, we make mention of you in our prayers.

Signed on behalf of the meeting,

WILLIAM KINGSBURY.

A HYMN suitable to the Subject.

1
GREAT Lord of all the churches hear.
 Thy ministers' and people's pray'r;
 Perfum'd by thee, O may it rise
 Like fragrant incense to the skies!

2
 May ev'ry pastor from above
 Be new inspir'd with zeal and love;
 To watch thy folds, and feed thy sheep,
 And his own heart with care to keep!

3
 Revive thy churches with thy grace;
 Heal all our breaches, grant us peace;
 Rouse us from sloth, our hearts inflame
 With ardent zeal for Jesus' name!

4
 May young and old thy word receive;
 Dead sinners hear thy voice and live:
 The wounded conscience healing find,
 And joy refresh each drooping mind!

5
 May aged saints, matured with grace,
 Abound in fruits of holiness;
 And when transplanted to the skies,
 May younger in their stead arise!

6
 Thus we our suppliant voices raise,
 And weeping, sow the seeds of praise,
 In humble hope, that thou wilt hear
 Thy ministers' and people's prayer.

A MISSIONARY HYMN.

Isaiah the 55th. Verse the 10th. to the end.

1

AS rain descending from the skies,
Waters the thirsty ground—
The sower reaps its rich supplies;
And plenty smiles around;

2

—So shall the showers of truth and love
Dispers'd through every clime,
Softens each soil, and make it prove
Fruitful in God's due time.

3

Hast thou not said; "My living word
Successful shall not be;"
But that thy faithful lab'ers, Lord,
Shall a glad harvest see?

4

Go forth then, Jesu's lab'ers go—
Break up the heathen soil;
Your gracious Master smiles on you,
And guards you while you toil.

5

Hearts like the rock or barren hill
Shall yield to truth divine.
Darkened and wretched souls shall feel
His beams of mercy shine.

6

Hark how the thronged mountains ring,
While Jesus you proclaim;
And thousands of poor pagans sing,
"Salvation through his name."

7

Where sins and thorny miseries grew,
His graces there abound;
And heav'nly fruits their beauties shew,
O'er all the blessed ground.

8

There shall his glorious name be known,
A sign thro' future days;
And children's children rise to crown
His honor'd head with praise.



